

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 CIAE-00

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SP-02 SS-15 HA-05 DEAE-00 SNM-05 /062 W

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 849

INFO USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USICA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3212

EO 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, SNAR, HO

SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO GAMERO DETENTION

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 3185

1. AN ORGANIZED STUDENT DEMONSTRATION, ORIGINALLY PROGRAMMED TO PROTEST THE LACK OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE ARMED FORCES' COMMUNIQUE OF JUNE 24 ON THE NARCOTICS SCANDAL, FOCUSED INSTEAD ON THE DETENTION OF MANUEL GAMERO AND THE ISSUE OF PRESS FREEDOM. THE JULY 6 DEMONSTRATION, ATTENDED BY PERHAPS 600 PERSONS, BROKE UP PEACEABLY.

2. A GOVERNMENT COMMUNIQUE, ALSO RELEASED JULY 6, ASSERTED THAT THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH GAMERO'S DETENTION, STATING THAT IT WAS ORDERED BY THE INDEPENDENT JUDICIAL SYSTEM. THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION, COL. ERIN O'CONNOR, INDICATED TO REPORTERS THAT THE GOH HAD REPLIED ALONG THESE LINES TO A CABLE FROM THE INTER-AMERICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION (REFTEL),
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AND EMPHASIZED THE HONDURAN GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUED RESPECT FOR PRESS FREEDOM.

3. COMMENT: THE DETENTION OF "TIEMPO" DIRECTOR MANUEL GAMERO DOES NOT MEAN PRESS FREEDOM HAS ENDED IN HONDURAS. ONE OF THE SINGULARLY REMARKABLE FACTS ABOUT THE PRESENT MILITARY GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN ITS RESPECT FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS,

AND GAMERO'S DETENTION MAY ONLY BE AN INCIDENT, RATHER THAN AN INDICATION OF A NEW POLICY. INDEED, THE PRESS, RADIO AND OTHER GROUPS HAVE MADE AMPLE USE OF THAT FREEDOM TO CRITICIZE THE GOVERNMENT, IN ITS HANDLING OF THE NARCOTICS SCANDAL AND FOR DETAINING GAMERO. O'CONNOR IS TECHNICALLY CORRECT, INsofar AS HE, O'CONNOR, WENT. NEVERTHELESS, THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS DEVELOPMENT IS THAT GAMERO IS ALMOST UNIVERSALLY SEEN AS BEING PUNISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR HIS INVESTIGATIVE ZEAL. GIVEN THE INFLUENCE THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH HAS OVER THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM, IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THE PUBLIC TO ACCEPT THE ASSERTION THAT GAMERO WAS DETAINED WITHOUT THE MILITARY'S ACQUIESCENCE, AT THE VERY LEAST.

4. THE MELGAR REGIME HAS BEEN WIDELY REGARDED AS WELL INTENTIONED AND ITS HUMAN RIGHTS PERFORMANCE, INCLUDING RESPECT FOR THE PRESS, HAS BEEN CONSIDERED VERY GOOD. THAT THE SITUATION HAS NOW REACHED THIS POINT IS AN INDICATION OF THE PRESSURES THE GOVERNMENT APPARENTLY FEELS ITSELF TO BE UNDER. THE NARCOTICS SCANDAL HAS CAUSED THE ARMED FORCES TO THREATEN THE PRESS AND TO CONSIDER A NEW PRESS LAW. WHAT HAS BECOME NOTICEABLE IS THE LACK OF ANY PUBLIC LEADERSHIP ON GENERAL MELGAR'S PART. ONE RADIO COMMENTATOR HAS OPENLY ASKED WHAT MELGAR'S ROLE HAS BEEN, AND WHETHER HE IS REALLY IN CHARGE OF THE SITUATION. IN FACT, AS HAS BEEN NOTED PREVIOUSLY, THIS ISSUE IS BEING VERY CLOSELY HELD AND HAS BEEN HANDLED FROM THE BEGINNING BY THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL
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(SDC), WHICH IS THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF AUTHORITY IN THE MELGAR REGIME, IN WHAT IS AN APPARENT ATTEMPT TO LIMIT DAMAGE TO THE ARMED FORCES AS AN INSTITUTION.
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